

The M Street School, 1896-1916



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The M Street School

Purpose of lesson:

This lesson is meant to provide an awareness, foster an understanding, and evoke an appreciation amongst students of the M Street School, which was one of the most prestigious and exceptional African American educational institutions to have ever existed in the United States. The students will become aware of the many accomplished principals, students, and teachers that were affiliated with the school. The students will also participate in activities that will provoke them to question the similarities and differences between the M Street School and theirs, and to also analyze the current state of educational achievement amongst African Americans and view of urban schools.

Overview:

The M Street School, as it was known as between 1891 and 1916, is regarded as one of the most exceptional, prestigious, and exemplary African American educational institutions that has ever existed within this country. This high school was located in Washington D.C., and it “offered students a rigorous academic curriculum and became synonymous with black achievement in education” (Roe 29). This occurred even with M Street being located within a segregated public school system that had been established within Washington D.C. by Congress in the 1860’s (Roe 27). Within the District of Columbia, there had been previous efforts by blacks to establish schools for themselves as well as attempts by administrators and teachers to educate free blacks decades before the Civil War. White Washingtonians though oftentimes “were opposed to educating African Americans, whether free or slave,” and even went as far as to force Mary Billings, “a White Englishwoman, [who] established a school in Georgetown in 1810 and taught white and free black children” to remove all of the white students from the school (Roe 28). However, in 1870 when the dual public school system was established “Initially black and white schools were essentially equal” (Roe 27).

The M Street High School initially began as the Preparatory High School for Negro Youth in 1870 when it was established by Congress and “Originally, it was hardly more than an advanced grammar school laboring under the disadvantages of an inadequate faculty, overcrowding, and dropouts” (Robinson 121). It became the famous M Street School in September of 1891 when “the high school was moved from the Miner Building at Seventeenth Street, between P and Q streets N.W. to a new building on M Street, near New York and New Jersey Avenues,” and “It would remain on that site until September 1916” (Robinson 120). It would later relocate to another site where it would become known as Dunbar High School (Robinson 120). As Henry S. Robinson writes, it was:

Between September 1891 and September 1916 M Street High graduated a multitude of young men and women. Many of these graduates achieved prominence in the local Washington community, others in the national and international communities, while a few ranked among the first Afro-Americans to obtain eminence in their respective professions. Of these professions we can cite business, dentistry, education, law, medicine, the military, music, and teaching. (120)

In his article entitled “The Education of Minority Children” Thomas Sowell notes that the attendance record of M Street School was remarkable and had “less absenteeism and less tardiness than the white high schools in Washington D.C. and that this was due to the fact that “The school had a tradition of being serious, going back to its founders and early principals” (81). At the school “Three courses of study were offered: academic, scientific, and business” (Robinson 136).



The M Street School had a long line of excellent principals who helped encourage excellence amongst its student body. These principals included Emma J. Hutchins, Mary J. Patterson, Richard T. Greener, Francis L. Cordozo, Dr. Winfield Scott Montgomery, Robert H. Terrell, Anna Julia Cooper, William Tecumseh Sherman Jackson, and Edward Christopher Williams. Mary Jane Patterson “was the first black woman to receive a college degree in the United States...from Oberlin College” in 1962 (Sowell 81). “Other early principals included the first black man to graduate from Harvard...four of the school’s first eight principals graduate from Oberlin and two from Harvard” (Sowell 81). Anna Julia Cooper (pictured on the right) “graduated from Oberlin College, class of [18]’84,” and “also held an M.A. from Oberlin” (Robinson 122). She also, “was awarded the degree of doctor of philosophy by the Sorbonne. She taught Latin, mathematics, and science; wrote a popular book, *A Voice from the South*, which was widely acclaimed in the national press; and instilled in her pupils high ideals of scholarship, racial pride, and self improvement” (Robinson 122)



In addition to excellent principals, The M Street School also had excellent teachers. Just a few of these teachers included Henry L. Bailey, Parker N. Bailey, Ulysses S.G. Bassett, Percival D. Brooks, Hugh M. Browne, Mary P. Burrill, Harriet Shadd Butcher, John W. Cromwell, Jr., Jessie Fauset, Ida A. Gibbs, Amplias Glenn, Angeline Grimke, E.B. Henderson, William T.S. Jackson, Lola Johnson, Mineola Kirkland, Julia Mason Layton, Caroline E. Parke, Harriet E. Riggs, Nevalle Thomas, Garnet C. Wilkinson, and Carter G. Woodson (Robinson 125). Carter G. Woodson (pictured on the left) “taught French, Spanish, English, and history. He spoke fluent French and Spanish and traveled widely in Europe and Asia” (Robinson 128). Robinson further adds, that “in 1912 he was awarded

the Ph.D. degree in history from Harvard University [and] in 1915 he founded the Association for the study of Negro Life and History” (Robinson 128). Woodson also wrote the enlightening and influential book entitled *The Mis-education of The Negro*.

The M Street School also produced a long list of many exceptional graduates from this institution who included Col. West A. Hamilton, Garnet C. Wilkinson, Benjamin Oliver Davis, Sr., John Coburn Bruce, Daniel Ammen Brooks, Robert Mattingly, Francis E. Rivers, Charles Hamilton Houston, Turner Layton, John R. Pinkett, Hilyard Robinson, Ionia Rollin Whipper, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Nellie M. Quander, Julia Evangeline Brooks, Mary Gibson Hundley, Rayford W. Logan, Ella Bruce, Alexzine, Eliza Montague, Nellie Burke, and Mamie K. Phillips. Nannie Helen Burroughs (pictured on the right) “was the founder of the National Trade and Professional School for Women and girls in 1909 at Lincoln Heights in Washington. The school’s curriculum emphasized practical and professional skills in household



work, gardening, interior decorating, and several allied vocational fields” (Robinson 134). She “also served as president of the Women’s Convention of the National Baptist Convention”



(Robinson 134). She also wrote an article entitled “12 Things the Negro Must Learn to do for Himself.” Charles Hamilton Houston (pictured on the left) “was one of the most brilliant and prominent graduates of M Street High” (Robinson 131). He graduated “at the age of fifteen in 1911 as class valedictorian” (Robinson 131). He further went on to graduate from Harvard, serve on the faculty of Howard University, serve in the United States army, graduate from Harvard Law School where “he was the first Afro-American to be elected an editor of the Harvard Law Review” (Robinson 131). He “would also lead the struggle to provide equal education for black citizens” (Roe 29).

Overall, the M Street School represents an exceptional school which exemplifies the amazing academic achievement made by African Americans within this country. As Thomas Sowell writes, “Over the entire eighty-five-year history of academic success of this school...most of its 12,000 graduates went on to higher education. This was very unusual for either black or white high-school graduates during this era” (Sowell, 82). Sowell also adds:

“Some M Street School graduates began going away to academically elite colleges in the early twentieth century. In 1903, the first M Street graduate went to Harvard. As of 1916, there were just nine black students, from the entire country, attending Amherst College. Six were from the M Street School. During the Period from 1918 to 1923, graduates of this school went on to earn fifteen degrees from Ivy League colleges and another thirty-five degrees from other predominately white institutions, including Amherst, Williams, and Wesleyan. This was in addition to 158 degrees from Miner’s Teacher College in Washington...Over the period from 1892 to 1954, Amherst admitted thirty-four graduates of the M Street School and Dunbar. Of these, seventy-four percent graduated and more than one-fourth of these graduates were Phi Beta Kappas” (83).

Finally, Sowell states that when Horace Mann Bond “studied the backgrounds of blacks with Ph.D.’s he discovered that more of them had graduated from M Street-Dunbar than from any other black high school in the country” (Sowell 83). The school should serve as a testament to the great intellectual abilities of African Americans and highlight the contributions made from the multitude of great figures affiliated with the M Street School. The school continues to exist, however it is now known as Dunbar High School.

Activities Section

These daily activities are based on a two-week time frame and are sequenced in a manner to where the initial purpose of the lesson, criteria for student projects, and timeline for completion are detailed within the first activity, and the activities that follow are to be done within the classroom while student projects are being worked on at home and if class if time permits them to do so.

After having provided the class with an overview of what the M Street School was and why it is significant, divide the class into four or five groups and provide them with the

article entitled “The M Street School, 1891-1916” by Henry S. Robinson, the “Principals, Students, and Teachers of M Street School Handout,” and a list with the names of Principals, teachers and students of the M Street School.”

*The number of groups is based on the assumption that the class may be between 20-30 students. If class is smaller fewer groups can be formed. They will remain in these groups for the duration of the unit.

Activity 1

(Monday)

Group Activity:

Work as a team to complete the “Principals, Students, and Teachers of M Street School Handout” using the Robinson article. Each group will have a handout with names on one side of the paper and various accomplishments on the other. The groups will try to match all of the people on their sheet to the accomplishment that belongs to them, and they will try to complete this before any of the other groups. The first team who finishes with all of the correct answers should get a prize of some sort. Afterwards each group will briefly share some of the people on their group’s list and their accomplishments with the class so everyone can know of the many talented and intelligent people associated with the M Street School.

Individual activity:

At the end of the group activity, have each student within each group select a person off their respective list to research in order to write a 2-3 page paper about them. Within their paper have them describe:

1. Why they chose to write about this person
2. Who their person is and their background
3. What contributions they made and why they are important

Also, have students create or find a picture of their person and create a superlative for them as well. Explain to them what a superlative is. The students will bring their pictures to class the Tuesday of the following week for that day’s activity. On Wednesday of the following week the students will turn in their papers. While working on their paper, students should also be preparing a two-minute role-play, poem, rap, or song pertaining to the person they chose to demonstrate to the class for that day’s activity.

Activity 2

(Tuesday)

Group Activity:

Within their groups, have student compare and contrast the curriculum of the M Street High School with the curriculum of their school. Tell them to analyze what the students were taking then and what they are taking now. Encourage each group to ask one another whether there is a great difference between the two, if one curriculum seems more challenging than the other, and if one seems like it would be more preparatory for college than the other. After each group has discussed this within their group, open the discussion to the entire class. Provoke them to question the curriculum that they are given at their school and come up with creative ways to address any problems they see within it.

*Prior to beginning this activity the teacher should give a brief overview of the M Street School and its curriculum and also touch on the practice of tracking within American schools as well as on the stances of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois in regards to classical vs. industrial education.

Activity 3

(Wednesday)

Group/Class Activity:

In this activity students and teacher will conduct a college search. Each group will select a principal, teacher, or graduate affiliated with the M Street School and look at the college(s) that they attended and what they majored in. After selecting a person, choose a college that they went to and prepare to examine the following things:

1. Where it is located?
2. Type of college it is (HBCU or HWCU)
3. What are the requirements to get in?
4. What is required today for the field of study that the person they selected majored in?
5. What is the cost?
6. What does the student population comprise of (racially, socioeconomically, gender wise)?

Groups may either go to four separate computers to do this and then report back to the class their findings, or, if the class has a smart board, this would be a great time for the teacher to utilize it. If this is done then the class as a whole can stay in their groups but the teacher can pull up each college on the internet, project the website on the smart board, and allow all students to view each college selected. After this is done, students should be asked to imagine what it would have been like for the person they you selected to have attended this school back during the time period in which they did.

Activity 4

(Thursday)

Individual activity:

Students will examine the concept of “mis-education.” Have student’s watch clip entitled “Carter G. Woodson-African American Trailblazers” found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkBEjJH1j5U>. Then they will look at excerpts from Woodson’s *The Mis-education of the Negro*. They will also receive a handout which is Nannie Helen Burroughs’ piece entitled “12 Things the Negro Must Do for Himself.” This can be retrieved from <http://www.blackmeninamerica.com/12.htm>. Each student will compare and contrast the two pieces by two African Americans affiliated with the M Street school. Each student will pick one point from each author and write a ¾-1pg response in which they answer the questions:

1. Why do these points mean to you?
2. Do you feel mis-educated at all? If so, how?

Students may share with class if they so choose. Responses are to be collected at end of the class.

Activity 5

(Friday)

Class activity:

Students will watch the 10 minute clip entitled “The Man who Ended Jim Crow, Charles H. Houston~Brown v Board of Ed Topeka” found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8yiLq8GufI>. Briefly discuss desegregation/integration and Charles H. Houston’s, a M Street graduate, major contribution to this occurring.

Group Activity:

Each group will be given a topic to look up on the computer which pertains to certain issues which occurred in the aftermath of desegregation and currently still persist. These will include the black-white achievement gap, limited presence of African American teachers, fear of acting-white phenomenon amongst African Americans in school, state of black males in America’s public schools. Each group will come up with 3-5 solutions for the problems they’ve reviewed and will propose them to the class.

Activity 6

(Monday)

Class/Group Activity:

The class will have a debate about culturally relevant teaching and Afrocentric approaches in education vs. the argument presented by Thomas Sowell in his article entitled “The Education of Minorities” against such approaches. The four groups will be combined to where there are two groups, and each one will argue from the position that they are given. Thomas Sowell’s argument can be found at <http://www.tsowell.com/speducat.html>. A good article on culturally relevant teaching can be found at <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/4474>.

Activity 7

(Tuesday)

Class Activity:

The students will bring the pictures they have either made or found of the person they have researched, and together the class will create a class composite display of former principals, teachers, and students of the M Street School which will be displayed outside of the classroom at the completion of the unit. Student will also bring their typed one sentence superlative they've created for their person to be placed underneath their person's picture. Students will use a large sheet of colored paper to place their pictures on. Students may decorate and design the composite as they see it.

Activity 8

(Wednesday)

Individual/Class Activity:

Students will perform their short skit, rap, poem, or song describing the principal, teacher or graduate of the M Street School that they chose. Each presentation should be limited to two-minutes so that the entire class can present during the class period. The teacher should have one question for each presenter and should also allow one question to come from one student for the presenter about their person.

Papers should be turned in on this day.

Activity 9

(Thursday-Friday)

Class activity:

Students will first be introduced to the story of Providence St. Mel (PSM), which is an inner city independent African American school that does extremely well in educating its student body in spite of all the blight and negative activity that occurs within the neighborhood in which the school is located. Articles on PSM can be found at <http://theprovidenceeffect.com/archives.html>.

Following this, the students will view the film *The Providence Effect* which chronicles the success of this institution. Depending on the length, it may have to be shown on Friday as well. If it finishes before class is over with have students give their reactions to the film.

Individual Activity:

Assign them a 1.5-2 page reaction paper where they will address the following:

What made Providence St. Mel successful?

In what ways was PSM like the M Street School?

In what ways was PSM different from the M Street School?

What will it take to have more schools like the M Street School and PSM in existence?

What will it take to see African American academic achievement as seen in PSM and the M street School occur in large numbers across the nation?

*Encourage students to take notes while watching the movie!

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Websites

<http://charleshamiltonhouston.org/Home.aspx>

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/brown/history/3-organized/legal-campaign.html>

<http://www.blackpast.org/>

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"The Man who Ended Jim Crow, Charles H. Houston~Brown v Board of Ed Topeka"

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8yiLq8GufI>.>

"Carter G. Woodson-African American Trailblazers."

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkBEjJH1j5U>.

"12 Things the Negro Must Do for Himself." <http://www.blackmeninamerica.com/12.htm>.

Person (Principal, Teacher, or Student)

	Sheet 1
	Accomplishment(s)
1. ____ Henry L. Bailey	
2. ____ Robert H. Terrell	
3. ____ Hilyard Robinson	
4. ____ Benjamin Oliver Davis, Sr.	A. Graduated from Oberlin College in 1862 and was the first African American woman to receive a college education. She became principal of The Preparatory High School after Emma J. Hutchins.
5. ____ Carter G. Woodson	
6. ____ Ida. A. Gibbs	
7. ____ Mary J. Patterson	B. Integrated the Tremont Trust Company in Boston as the first Afro-American bank-clerk and teller. Taught at Dunbar High School. She is the author of The Dunbar Story
8. ____ Mary Gibson Hundley	
9. ____ John W. Cromwell, Jr.	
10. ____ Col. West A. Hamilton	C. Graduated from M Street in 1889. Taught French there as well. D. Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Dartmouth College. Taught German, Latin, and mathematics at M Street School. E. Second principal of M Street to have a degree from Harvard. Encouraged other boys to attend there as well. Had a wide acquaintance with quality educators across the country. F. Graduated from M street School in 1898 and had an outstanding military career. Was the first Afro American General in the regular army. G. An architect who designed the Langston Housing Project and Frederick Douglass Dwellings of Washington, D.C. Served as lieutenant in WWI. Head of architecture at Howard University for 10 years.

H. Graduated in 1904. Served in WWI and was on active duty in WWII. Served 21 years on the Board of Education in D.C.

I. Taught French, Spanish, English, and history. Earned Ph.D degree in History from Harvard. Founded A.S.L.A.H.

J. Taught English at M Street School

Person (Principal, Teacher, or Student)

Sheet 2

Accomplishment(s)

1. ____ Charlotte Atwood

2. ____ Garnet C. Wilkinson

3. ____ Caroline E. Parke

4. ____ Daniel Ammen Brooks

5. ____ Angeline Grimke

6. ____ Mineola Kirkland

7. ____ Anna Julia Cooper

8. ____ Mary P. Burrill

9. ____ Harriet E. Riggs

10. ____ Ionia Rollen Whipper

A. Graduated from M Street School in 1892. Earned the degree of doctor of medicine from Howard University. Opened a home for unwed mothers in northeast Washington in 1944

B. Graduated as valedictorian from M street in 1897. From 1916 and 1946 was principal in of the Reynolds Elementary School in Philadelphia. Received a PhD in Education from University of Pennsylvania.

C. Held a M.A. from Oberlin College. Received degree of doctor of philosophy in 1925 by the Sorbonne. Wrote *Voices from the South*.

D. A native of Washington D.C. Taught for fifty years at M Street. She taught algebra until her retirement in July 1922.

E. Was both an educator and a doctor. Graduated from the Calais Academy in in Maine and taught in the M Street and Dunbar high schools until 1922.

F. Graduted from M Street High in 1898. Received a bachelor of arts from Oberlin and Harvard. Taught Latin and mathematics.

G. Offered courses in English. Described as an excellent teacher.

H. Graduated in 1892. Achieved outstanding reputation as a physics and biology teacher and as a supervisor in the D.C. public schools.

I. Taught English at M Street school. Graduated from Wellesley College

J. Taught English at M Street school. Graduated from Emerson College.

Sheet 3

Person (Principal, Teacher, or Student)

Accomplishment(s)

1. ____ Nannie Helen Burroughs

2. ____ Hugh M. Browne

3. ____ Ulysses S.G. Bassett

4. ____ William Tecumseh Sherman
Jackson

5. ____ Robert Mattingly

6. ____ Mamie K. Phillips

7. ____ John R. Pinkett

8. ____ Francis L. Cordoza

9. ____ Julia Evangeline Brooks

10. ____ John Coburn Bruce

A. Became the first principal of the M Street School from 1884-1896. Was educated at Glasgow University in Scotland. Founded the Avery Institute in Charleston, South Carolina

B. Received a B.A. from Howard University. Taught English and Spanish at Dunbar High School from 1916-1922 and later served as assistant principal and principal of Dunbar.

C. Graduated from M street in 1907. Won competitive scholarship to Amherst and majored in mathematics. Achieved fame as an outstanding football player. Founded an insurance company

D. One the D.C.'s outstanding educators. Graduated from M Street in 1895. Held supervising principalship of the 13th division in D.C. from 1918-1940.

E. Founder of the National Trade and Professional School for Women and Colored Girls in 1909. Served as president of the Women's Convention of the National Baptist Convention.

F. Received a M.A. in Amherst in 1897. Taught math at M Street from 1892 to 1904 and served as principal from 1906 to 1909.

G. Graduated from Howard in 1875. Received a bachelor of theology from Princeton. Taught Physics at M Street.

H. Taught mathematics at M street High School

I. Graduated from M Street in 1902. Received B.A. from Amherst in three years. Was the first pupil of M Street to graduate from Amherst.

J. Graduated M Street in 1903. Mother of Paul P. Cooke.

Sheet 4

Person (Principal, Teacher, or Student)

Accomplishment(s)

1. ____ Dr. Winfield Scott Montgomery

2. ____ Charles Hamilton Houston

3. ____ Turner Layton

4. ____ Amplias Glenn

5. ____ Mary Gibson Hundley

6. ____ Parker N. Bailey

7. ____ Jessie Fauset

8. ____ Edward Christopher Williams

9. ____ Nellie M Quander

10. ____ Rayford W. Logan

A. Integrated the Tremont Trust Company in Boston as the first bank clerk and teller. Earned a M.A. in French from Middlebury Collge in 1929. Author of *The Dunbar Story*.

B. Received a B.A. from Howard University in 1912. Received a master of arts degree from Columbia in 1918. First baisleus of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority

C. Born in slavery. Graduated from Dartmouth. Was awarded degree of doctor medicine. Succeeded Cardozo as principal of M Street

D. Graduated from M Street in 1913. Graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Williams College 1917. Was a professor at Howard University and authored many scholarly books and articles.

E. Talented musician and composer. Achieved prominence in the world of music in New York and London.

F. Graduated at age 15 and was class valedictorian. First African American editor of *Harvard Law Review*. Won the *Murray v. The University of Maryland Law School* in 1935.

G. Last principal of the M Street school.
Graduated from Western Reserve University.

H. Graduated from Oberlin in 1902. Taught
fourth-year Latin. Helped 23 M Street
students obtain dscholarships to Amherst,
Bowdoin, Brown, Dartmouth, Harvard, Iowa
State, and Yale

I. Graduated in 1905 from M Street. Phi Beta
Kappa graduate of Cornell University. A
brilliant writer and taught French.

J. Graduated from Harvard. Taught English at M
Street.

Answers for “Principals, Students, and Teachers of M Street School” Handouts

Sheet 1

1.) C 2.) E 3.) G 4.) F 5.) A 6.) J. 7.) A 8.) B 9.) D 10.) H

Sheet 2

1.) I 2.) F 3.) D 4.) B 5.) G 6.) H 7.) C 8.) J 9.) E 10.) A.

Sheet 3

1.) E 2.) G 3.) H 4.) F 5.) I 6.) J 7.) C 8.) A 9.) B 10.) D

Sheet 4

1.) C 2.) F 3.) E 4.) H 5.) A 6.) J 7.) I 8.) G 9.) B 10.) D

Principals	Teachers	Students
Emma J. Hutchins	Henry L. Bailey	Col. West A. Hamilton
Mary J. Patterson,	Parker N. Bailey	Garnet C. Wilkinson
Richard T. Greener	Ulysses S.G. Bassett	Benjamin Oliver Davis, Sr.
Francis L. Cordozo	Hugh M. Browne	John Coburn Bruce
Dr. Winfield Scott Montgomery	Mary P. Burrill	Daniel Ammen Brooks
Robert H. Terrell	Harriet Shadd Butcher	Robert Mattingly
Anna Julia Cooper	John W. Cromwell, Jr.	Francis E. Rivers
William Tecumseh Sherman Jackson	Jessie Fauset	Charles Hamilton Houston
Edward Christopher Williams	Ida A. Gibbs	Turner Layton
	Amplias Glenn	John R. Pinkett
	Angeline Grimke	Hilyard Robinson
	William T.S. Jackson	Ionia Rollin Whipper
	Lola Johnson	Nannie Helen Burroughs
	Mineola Kirkland	Nellie M. Quander
	Julia Mason Layton	Julia Evangeline Brooks
	Caroline E. Parke	Mary Gibson Hundley
	Harriet E. Riggs	Rayford W. Logan
	Nevalle Thomas	Ella Bruce
	Garnet C. Wilkinson	
	Carter G. Woodson	

